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A
Descriptive
Reading

ON

CASHMERE

Illustrated

BY

12 Lantern Slides

WILLIAM H. RAU
PHILADELPHIA
1891



A
DESCRIPTIVE READING
ON
CASHMERE

ILLUSTRATED BY TWELVE LANTERN
SLIDES

Edmund Stirling



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CASHMERE.

“Who has not heard of the Vale of Cashmere,
With its roses, the brightest that earth ever gave,
Its temples, and grottos, and fountains as clear
As the love-lighted eyes that hang over their wave?”

WITH these words Feramorz begins his delightful narrative of the adored Nourmahal, the Light of the Harem. The “unequalled Valley” has ever been to the poets and romancers of the East, as well as in our own half of the world, the ideal of an terrestrial paradise. The striking contrast between the arid plains of Hindustan, but a few miles beyond its circling barrier of mountains, with the constant Spring and verdure of the Happy Valley has contributed to give it fame. Situated in the very midst of the desolate and barren peaks of the Himalayas, it seems as though the surrounding country had been denuded of its natural ornaments in order that its lovely slopes and plains might be made beautiful.

1. Panorama of Cashmere from the Kiosk.—The view of the valley, which lies spread at one’s feet from some commanding height, is rendered, therefore, peculiarly charming by contrast with the circle of bare and solitary summits which enclose it. Before us is spread out a wide expanse of verdant plain, a land of perpetual Spring, which has been aptly described as “a veritable jewel in Nature’s own setting

of frightful precipices, everlasting snows, vast glaciers." These rugged features of the country, while serving as a contrast to—

"Kashmir-bi-Nuzir—without an equal ;
Kashmir-Junat-puzir—equal to Paradise."

serve also as its natural protector, guarding it alike from the fiery heat of the tropical plains to the south, and from the ice and snow from the higher regions of the Himalayas to the north. The Vale is an irregular oval, about ninety miles long by twenty miles wide, and is a comparatively level plain situated in that portion of the Himalaya range which marks the north-west boundary of Hindustan, at a height of 5,200 feet above the sea. The surrounding peaks which overlook this remarkable region, vary in height from 8,000 to 15,000 feet on the southern side, and reaching an altitude of 18,000 on the north, some of the loftier summits being covered with perpetual snow. To all appearances these mountains present an unbroken wall, but there is one opening—that out of which the river Jhelam flows, at the northwestern end of the valley. There are a number of passes into Cashmere, however, only four of which are open to the general traveller. The lowest of these is 11,000 feet above the level of the sea. Once within the valley we find that it is divided into two nearly equal parts by the Jhelam, upon which is situated, near its outlet, the capitol city of the country, Srinagar. The plain, as we have said, is comparatively level, but it is broken in places by raised plateaus or kareewahs. In the background of the view before us is to be seen one of the kareewah, divided in places by deep ravines, down

which the torrents of the mountains beyond flow to add their volume to the waters of the Jhelam. The general aspect of the country, as we see, is that of one vast orchard, abounding in pomegranates, apples and pears, while in most places it is richly cultivated for the smaller vegetable products of the soil.

2. Maharajah's Summer Palace on the Jhelam.

—The natural approach to Srinagar, the chief city of the valley, is by its great thoroughfare, the River Jhelam, which flows from the south-east to the north-west close to the northern boundary of the plain. The city lies on each side of the river, extending for a distance of nearly three miles. To the north and almost encircling the city is the Dal, or city lake, which is connected with the Jhelam by various canals. This circumstance, coupled with the further fact that Srinagar has practically no streets as we understand the term, has given to the city the name of the Venice of the East—a designation aptly applied. We find here a race of boatmen who know no other homes than their floating doongahs and shikaras, and these vehicles are the universal means of conveyance, not only from point to point in the city but to the various villages and towns with which the floor of the valley is dotted.

As we float gently down the placid stream our attention is attracted to a large square building, on the right—the summer palace of the Maharajah. There is little about it to suggest that it is the abode of royalty, except its generous proportions. The ruler of Jummoo and Cashmere occasionally comes here, and it sometimes happens that distinguished visitors are

entertained here, for the Maharajah carries out to the letter all that even the strict laws of Oriental hospitality could demand. Farther on, the commanding hill known as the Takt-i-Suliman, or the seat of Suliman, overlooks the city. From the river we can just discern the outline of a temple, the history of which carries us back to 200 years before the Christian Era. It had its origin with a Buddhist prince, passed afterwards into the hands of the Moslem conquerors, and now the sacred emblem of Siva shows that it is again used in a place of Hindu worship. The building is in a remarkable state of preservation, notwithstanding its hoary antiquity and is one of the few remains of a rival worship, which were left standing by the fierce fanaticism of the followers of Mohammed.

3. Grand Avenue of Poplars.—We have said that there are no streets in Srinagar, that the river and canals are its thoroughfares and that boats are its vehicles. While this is a fact there is one noteworthy exception, a noble avenue of poplars, which leads from the river just below the point we have just passed. Poplars are very common in the valley, but no where in the world can there be found so many stately specimens as are assembled here. This avenue has been called the "Rotten Row" of Srinagar. Here may be seen the wealth and beauty of Cashmere—a race, as is well known, famous throughout the world for its physical perfection. And no better opportunity could be had for seeing the people at their best than at their national game of "coghan" or polo, which is played on the parade ground, near the termination of the Avenue of Poplars. The imita-

tion of this exciting game which we have seen in England and the United States, bears but a light resemblance to the original. All classes of society in Cashmere and the adjacent province of Baltistan engage in it as if 'twas the one object of life, the children playing it in fact until they are old enough and acquire sufficient skill to take part in the wild scramble on horseback. The game is a very ancient one, having been known in Constantinople in the 12th century, and it was brought to Europe and America, being borrowed from these people in the fastnesses of the Himalayas.

4. Down the Jhelam from the Maharajah's City Palace.—There is nothing monotonous in the ride through the city proper, as this glimpse from the Sher Garhi (the city fort and palace) will indicate. At one time the river was embanked, between certain defined limits, by huge blocks of lime-stone, but of these there remain at present little but the ruins. As at Venice, great flights of steps lead up from the water's edge at different points. There are no regular lines of buildings, each house being independent of every other as to style as well as position, a fact which contributes greatly to the picturesque. Many of the domes of the Hindu temples are entirely covered with gold, which glitters in the sun-light rendering them visible for very long distances. Such an one is in the view before us. At our feet is a characteristic group of the native boats. There, for instance, is the doongah, one of the larger craft available for journeys. It is 50 or 60 feet in length, and from 6 to 8 feet wide. Half of its length is covered by awnings of matting sup-

ported by a wooden frame-work. Curtains of matting at the sides and end afford complete privacy and the apartment thus obtained being large enough for a bed or other furniture, the traveller can make himself very comfortable—at least, as much so as in any tent or in some of the native houses which he may be called upon to use. The after part of the boat is occupied by the crew, who with their wives and families make it their home all the year round. Both men and women take a share in the work of navigation, moving down stream by the aid of the current and by heart-shaped paddles. When the course is up-stream, the boat is drawn by the whole family harnessed together to a long tow-line.

5. Third Bridge Across the Jhelam.—The two portions of the city of Srinagar, on either side of the Jhelam, are connected by seven quaint bridges, very old. They are formed of the trunks of the Himalaya cedar, or deodar, driven into the bed of the stream and supported with stones to form the foundations for the piers. The latter are built up of alternate layers of deodar, each successive layer projecting beyond the other so as to lessen the span. The upper timbers forming the road are sometimes covered with earth, and one of the bridges has upon its deck a row of shops, suggesting the old London bridge. The structure spanning the stream, in the view before us, is the Fati Kadal, or the third bridge, while on the right bank—the prominent building in sight—is the Shah Hamadan Musjid, one of the most celebrated and most elaborate mosques in the country. Like most others of its kind it is built of wood, the invaluable

deodar; bells hang at various points from the projecting roof, and, unlike the greater number of mosques, a golden ball surmounts the whole instead of the crescent. It is a shrine of great sacredness, and is claimed to have been founded on the site of an earlier Hindu temple, by a descendant of the prophet who was transported through the air to Cashmere from Samarkand. A curious feature of this and other buildings of Srinagar is the growth of vegetation upon the house-tops. This is referred to by the poet, who tells us that "the fair city on the Lake, whose houses, roofed with flowers appeared at a distance like one vast and variegated parterre" could not tempt *Lalla Rookh* from the sad thoughts from which she entered the Happy Valley. Behind the mosque, on an isolated hill about 300 feet high, frowns the Harri Parbat, a fortress built by the great Akbar, in 1590, to over-awe his recently conquered city. It is no longer formidable, however, and though occupied by a small garrison, is in a half-ruined condition.

6. Apple Tree Canal and Hindu Temple from Chenar Bagh.—The Dal, or city lake, and the Jhelam are connected by several canals, but none are so famous as this Apple Tree canal, as we see it from the Isle of Chenar, in the Lake. Flowing peacefully between rows of beautiful trees, exquisite gardens ascending on either side, this silver pathway presents an ideal of Oriental beauty and splendor. Leading from the city palace of the Maharajah, on the Jhelam, through the centre of the city, it terminates at the city gate of the Dal, close to the famous Char Chenar. This was one of several gardens and islands con-

structed by the Delhi Emperors. The Char Chenar, or as it is also known, Rupa Lank (or Silver Island), is a about an acre in extent, and it is ornamented by a single chenar, or plane tree, at each corner. It is said to have been planned by the beautiful Nourmahal, wife of the Shah Jehangir. And not far away is the wonderful garden of Shalimar, that Imperial palace which was "the best loved abode" of the Mogul princes, the glories of which are so vividly described in the great poetical work already quoted.

7. Cashmere Musicians.—Reference has already been made to one class of the inhabitants of the valley—the boatmen. And while we look at this group of Cashmere musicians it is interesting to recall the fact that in spite of the natural mountain barriers which protect it, the Happy Valley has been a constant temptation to foreign invaders. Its history is a record of successive conquests and changes of rulers and of religion; and at the present day, while under the rule of a Hindu monarch, the mass of the people are followers of Mohammed. With respect to the natives of Cashmere, and their characteristic physical beauty, it should be added that they have been likened to "beautiful ancient statues not yet cleansed of the earth to which they had lain buried for ages." They appear to have no idea as to the utility of water for personal application; and another personal peculiarity is that they excel in the Eastern art of lying—two points in which they are lamentably out of keeping with their poetic surroundings. It is hardly worth our while therefore to seek to make closer acquaintance with the inhabitants of this Indian paradise, for

the experience could not fail to be disappointing. This does not matter greatly, however, for the marvellous beauty of our surrounding is such that our time can be fully and profitably occupied in a study of the country.

8. Black Glaciers in the Himalayas near Amurnath.—Thus far but little has been said of the mountains which surround the Happy Valley, the mighty ridge of the Himalayas whose stupendous masses and towering summits suggested to the Hindu mythology the idea that they formed the support for the roof of the world. They are, it must be remembered, the greatest mountain range in the world, both as to extent and elevation. The mountains extend along the northern boundary of Hindustan, a distance of from 1200 to 1500 miles, and cover a territory 150 miles wide. When it is stated that the mean height of these passes through the Himalayas is over 17,000 feet, the wonderful character of the Cashmere Vale will be better appreciated, its level being but little over 5,000 feet. The northern wall of this valley is broken by several small and narrow valleys or gorges, the most famous being those of the Scind and the Liddar. The latter is one of the most wild and picturesque in the region, and is a little to the north of East of Srinagar. At its upper end it is connected by a narrow pass with the Scind Valley, and with the great Zoji or Dras Pass, which at an elevation of 11,300 feet, leads into the lofty plateaus of Dras. We are now close to the limits of the eternal snow, and these wonderful black glaciers in the Liddar Valley, flowing down from summits of 17,000 to 18,000 feet, give an idea of the unutterable desolation of the view.

9. View from the Cave of Amur-nath.—We have chosen this narrow and difficult pass for our excursion in the mountains in order to visit one of the most sacred of the Hindu shrines in all India—the Cave of Amur-nath, the place where the immortal Siva is worshiped. We are standing now upon a narrow ledge of rock, at an elevation of 16,000 feet above the sea. At our right the precipitous wall of rock rises to the dizzy heights of the surrounding summits—from 4,000 to 7,000 feet above us, while below is a narrow defile leading westward toward the Scind and Zoji Pass. There is a glacier, here, in every hollow of the ridge and in every corner where the ice can take a foothold. The glaciers, however, do not extend very low, the lowest in this immediate region being 10,500 feet above the sea. In certain seasons of the year it is possible to reach Amur-nath from the Scind, but the pass is often rendered inaccessible by snow and hence the thousands of pilgrims who annually come here, travel by way of the Liddar.

10. Dead Pilgrim on the Road to Amur-nath.—This illustration of the courage and perservance which is given to the weakest and poorest specimens of mankind by religious zeal and fanaticism, was found on the road to this sacred shrine of Siva. Like many others of his faith he suffered the roughness and dangers of a journey into the “Abode of Snow,” in order that he might share the reward promised to the faithful who offer their orisons at this Mecca of the Hindus. He was overtaken by a sudden blast of air from the icy heights above, and being but scantily clothed succumbed to the piercing cold. The subject is a

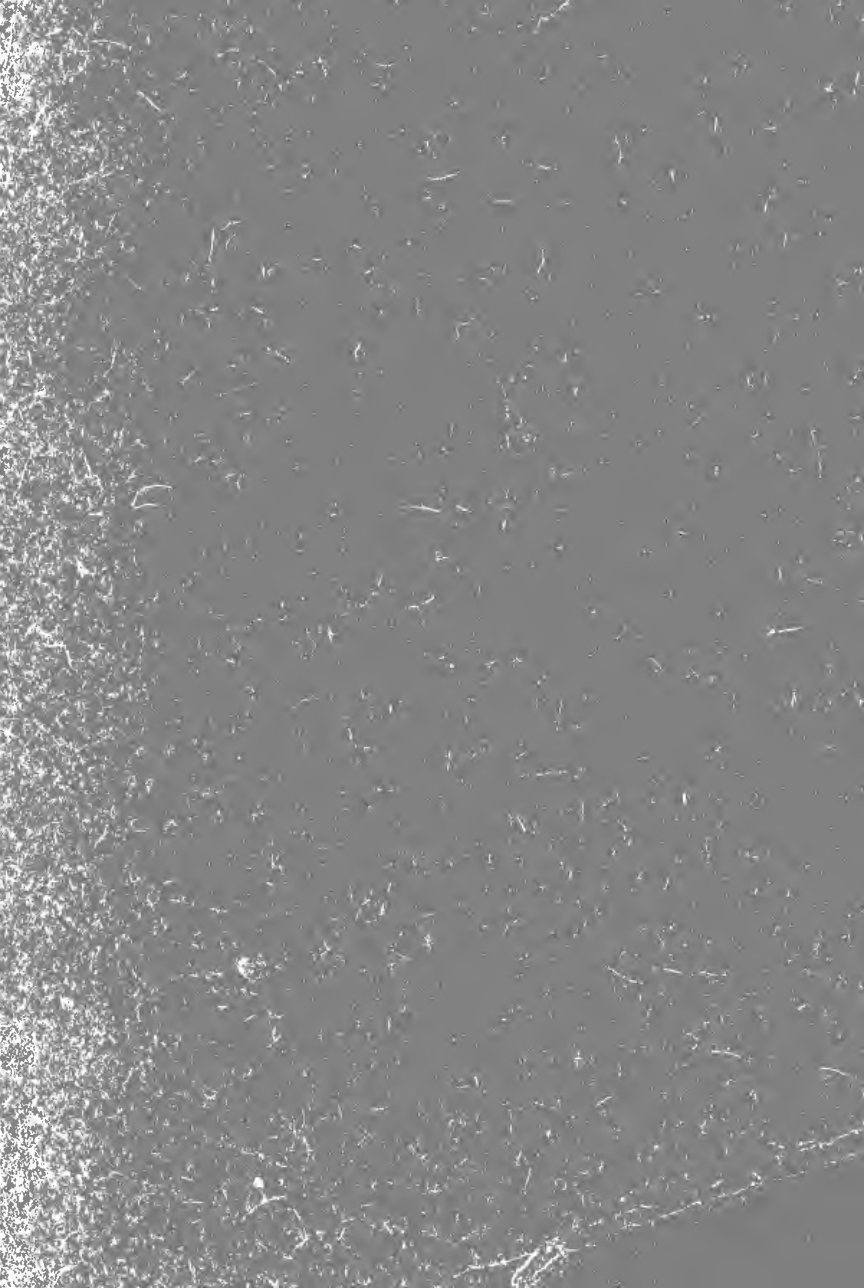
melancholy one, but the loss of this victim was probably not mourned by his nearest relatives and friends, for his death in the performance of so pious an act as a pilgrimage to Amur-nath, has, according to their belief, insured for him a happy future.

11. Sacred Cave of Amur-nath.—The sacred cave itself is, as we have already shown, at a desolate and weird spot, in one of the wildest of the mountain recesses. It is of gypsum, about 150 feet square and about 30 feet high, and is filled with stalactites and icicles. Siva, one of the Hindu divinities, is supposed to reside in the cave, under the form of one of the numerous blocks of ice which fill the crevices of the rocks. The annual worship of Siva at this all but inaccessible shrine, is said to have had its origin in the example of the divinities who were under the special protection of the Lord Siva. Thousands of pilgrims of every caste and rank, from every portion of Hindustan visit Amur-nath annually to take part in the great ceremony on the 24th of July—the frequent fatalities from exposure or from avalanches in no way checking the enthusiasm of the devotees. The ceremony that takes place upon their arrival is thus described: “When the pilgrims arrive at the mouth of the cave they commence shouting, clapping their hands, and calling upon Siva. ‘Show yourself to us,’ is the universal and simultaneous exclamation and prayer of prostrate thousands. The cave is much frequented by rock pigeons, which, affrighted at the noise, rush out tumultuously, and are the answer to the prayer. In the body of one or other of these resides the person of their divinity; and Siva, the

Destroyer and All-powerful, is considered to be present and incarnate, as the harmless dove." The Fakirs and Brahmins, who attend the deity, are repaid for the desolate character of their abode and of their life, by the generosity of the pilgrims who consider that proper maintenance is a first duty.

12. Clouds Lifting from the Snow-Clad Peaks.— With one more view in this incomparable valley, in the mountains near the sacred cave, our visit to Kashmir must end. We have here in this single vista, the tree-clad mountains and the bare peaks rising to an altitude of over 23,000 feet, capped with their every present crests of snow. The great cloud masses which had filled the narrow gorge before us have gradually risen, until they are now rolling away from the peaks, revealing to us their rugged outlines. No sign of human life mars the somber majesty of the prospect, and we cannot help but feel that surroundings, such as these are, fit places for the abodes of the gods. The mighty hills stand——

“Ranged in white ranks against the blue—untrod,
Infinite, wonderful—whose uplands vast,
And lifted universe of crest and crag,
Shoulder and shelf, green slope and icy horn,
Riven ravine, and splintered precipice
Led climbing thought higher and higher, until
It seemed to stand in Heaven and speak with gods.”





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